

THE UNHOLY TRIO

NOVEMBER 17, 1957

Scripture: Matt. 25:34-45

It is the good pleasure of God that all his children enjoy good health. While He permits sickness on earth, still we must conclude that most of our ailments either are self-induced or the result of a life that does not obey the rules of God. There is no real health unless it involves the total personality of man: his body, his mind and his soul.

Today there is at work in all of us an unholy trio of forces that are designed to accomplish one thing: our death. We call them the death impulses, forces that are at variance with life. They dog our steps from the cradle to the grave being more pronounced in some than in others but present in us all. Age merely intensifies their work. So to look at them in this sermon and know what to do about them would mark us as a thinking people who are interested in these temples wherein God can dwell.

AN INFLATED SELF

The first of this unholy trio is an inordinate ego . . . too big a self. From the time that we are spanked by the hands of a physician at birth the ego comes alive. In its rightful size it is your best personality possession; for without the right size one becomes a coward to life, shy, introverted, reticent, and a cringing soul who knows no joy for living. That is when the ego is too small. Life is apologized for, crowds run away with such a person. But when the ego is too big, life is lived out almost exclusively in terms of me, mine and myself. God cannot come into such a life because there is no room for Him or anyone else.

Even the young child in the cradle discovers his own ego and exercises all kinds of strategy to expand it. Temper tantrums with the mother's attention, feigned illness, shrilling cries . . . all these to either win a warm bottle, change of diapers, or a cuddle of affection. That's all right in the

cradle, but the point at which it becomes a liability is when the growing baby reaches manhood and still pitches his temper tantrums to get attention in society, or pouts to win acclaim. Such accounts for the fifty year old babies who sum up life only in terms of what pleases them, or makes for their individual profits. Here is the incubator for selfishness. A self-centered ego is the highest obstacle that ever confronts God. It is the man who works at his job all day and half the night to amass more profits for creature comfort; it is the farmer who had rather walk over his acres than to walk to the altar on Sunday; the business man too occupied by Ceasar to hear the call of Christ. The one best prescription to assure mental sickness is the first of this infamous trio: selfishness.

Christ's prescription for mental health was the exact opposite from what I have said. About 90% of all that He said and did was to get man out of himself. To the endless queries of sick folks He would say, "take you mind off yourself; forget your tomorrows, your yesterdays and concentrate on today; forget your lack of promotions, forget your health and lose yourself in the magnificent obsession of someone else's burdens, another man's sorrows, another's misery. Do this because an inordinate concern about your own health is the most tedious of diseases." The vast majorities of people with whom I have counseled about mental health were suffering from the malady of "me": The disease which comes from a preoccupation about self. They ask, "What book can I read, what doctor can I see, what psychiatrist do you recommend?" as though the answer was that simple. Many times I simply tell them that no book nor doctor can do for them what must be done. Only they can do it and the methods are many, the best of which is to go out and lose yourself in some profitless, self-forgetting, noble task that will benefit other folks . . . preferably total strangers.

UNSELFISH ACTS

If you please, like those mountain climbers in the Alps who forego the pain of frostbitten feet by taking off their shoes and mutually massaging one another's feet. But too many of us are proud to say, "My feet are cold and nearly frozen, won't somebody rub mine? After all, can't you see that I'm sick, do something for me." Whereas what we really need to do is to listen to the moans of those who are far more ill than we, to take off our coats and roll up our sleeves and start the ministries of love in the direction of that suffering brother. Lo, and behold, in the process you will drop beads of sweat from your own brow and feet and the misery of aching cold left yours in the process.

Such is what Jesus meant when He said, "He that would save his life shall lose it; but he that will lose his life for my sake, shall find it."

There in the stately pines of the old South stood a fine Georgian colonial mansion with all the appointments that make for gracious living. But in a stone's throw of the backyard in full sight of the big house's veranda, save a few bamboo shoots to thinly hide it, stood thirteen dirty unpainted shanty houses. Not a toilet in a one of them; no running water. But the man in the mansion owned all thirteen of them. Dirty faced children, poorly clothed and undernourished played in the red mud between the shanties. But the man in the mansion was reputed to be a fine Christian. Some Christianity that will let a person rock in air-conditioned splendor on his veranda while some of God's other children live in squalor! The unholy force of a selfish disposition is the work of death inside a person. We, like Michael Angelo, about whom it was said that he worked with a candle on the band of his cap as he stood before the canvas painting in order to keep even his own shadow out of the way—so should we remove the long, dark, foreboding shadows thrown on life by an imposing ego.

AN UNDISCIPLINED MIND

The second of this troublesome three is an undisciplined mind. If many insane persons could come back to rational think-

ing, they would convince us that among the things that caused their mental illness was the lack of intelligent, mental discipline. Things were allowed to run away with them, the mind never had a steering wheel to guide the personality around the roadblocks. Once again, this starts in the cradle, when a child finds that he can get what he wants by acting, such can carry over into adulthood. Who asks today whether or not what we want so much is best for us, or will contribute to the good of other than ourselves? Who foregoes pleasure that life's higher outreaches may be accomplished? We want what we want when we want . . . most times, regardless of consequences. Practiced long enough, the mind becomes a marshland of undisciplined forces and eventual mental illness. Each of us needs to relearn, if perchance we ever knew it, the art of saying "no" with as much ease as we say "yes." To know that a redlight means to stop, rather than rationalizing our colorblindness is to speak of abiding wisdom, the like of which we know too little.

This ugly facet of life is hard to live with. It is the picture of many employers shouting to employees in the autocratic tone of a dictator, or the father of the house in commanding tenor, or wife or mother in shrilling yells trying to mimic the year-old child. Such is the emotional immaturity that speaks of an unholy trio working to rob life of real meaning. A wild passion, an unruly temper, a vulgar tongue . . . whatever it be, a sense of cultured discipline can overcome it. Living in the carousel whirl of modern tensions, nothing short of an intelligent disciple can survive the dervish of moods, changing temperament and unstable fortunes.

In the soilbed of an undisciplined mind, neuroses of every hue and color can germinate. The depths of depression, the notion that the whole world is against you, the feeling that we can't win . . . and all that sprout up in a mind that refuses to police itself.

Christians should know the capacity of a French Captain, who during the French Revolution was told to aim his artillery on a certain farm house in which the enemy had taken refuge. But the French captain paused a minute, paled in face,

then gave the command to fire. Instantly, the house was blown to bits. The commanding officer asked the captain, "What is wrong, you hesitated a bit and then paled?" Whereupon the captain answered, "That house was my home." It takes a lot of discipline to train the big guns right on the target your mind cherishes most, but sometimes the warfare of life is at stake . . . even your own mental health.

SPIRITUAL STERILITY

The force that makes the unholy trio complete is spiritual sterility. If you please, the sign of nothingness, that state of affairs when a chilling neutrality sweeps through life, leaving it bereft of vitality, joy and purpose. When the core of one's heart is a vacuum instead of God's enthronement, when life becomes a mere procession of days, when the headwaters of significance are allowed to dry up . . .

then the spirit knows a pale sterility and the death impulse is actively at work. This can be the mood of life without any design; all that is needed is to do nothing. Just regard life as a flickering candle instead of a flaming torch, hear the proclamation of holy things with the same indifference that you do radio commercials, interpret this magnificent, awful drama of life as "one dern thing after another," then your soul will die within you whether your body does or not. There is in evidence a type of spiritual rigor mortis even to the odor that can survive in perfectly healthy bodies!

This is the sum of the matter: if you would know that mental health which comes with an experience in Jesus then fight that trio of death impulses: selfishness, and undisciplined mind and spiritual sterility.

A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR

NOVEMBER 24, 1957

Scripture: Matthew 5: 13-16

The life of religion, like social life, wants to see the show but doesn't like to hear the commercials. Usually when it comes time for the sponsor to say a word, that is the time when we sign off mentally, or go get something to drink, or engage in small talk until the program resumes. We go for the entertainment but not for the commercials. Yet, anyone knows that without a sponsor there would be no show. I am not arguing in defense of some of the monotonous gimmicks so insulting to intellect, but I am quick to defend the sponsor's right to have his say if he is to provide the entertainment. Without the divine sponsor, there would be no program called life. We like to live but often dislike a word from the sponsor at His own chosen time.

Life for most of us is bountiful; like a many manualed organ, it has a variety of stops, accommodating every need of life. The fact that we Americans have a horn of plenty opened before us is beyond argument. Now it is high time that we who have listened to every other authority on the subject give an ear to the real

sponsor of this program . . . yea, God Himself. God has been trying to get His word in for a long time, but the babbling voices of many other contenders have drowned Him out. So let's head a word from our sponsor.

CALL HIM "LORD"

His first clear word is disconcerting; little wonder we turn from it with immediate dispatch. The word? "Why call ye me, 'Lord, Lord', and do not the things which I say?" God has been trying to get that commercial in ever since the program started, yet we have insisted on such rapid fire paces of entertainment . . . ecclesiastical and otherwise, that we haven't stopped long enough to hear it and heed it. The fact that many are calling Him "Lord, Lord" is easy to see. Phenominal numbers are in the "Lord calling" business for the first time, but therein is part of the trouble. To call Him "Lord," is one thing; but to serve Him as Lord is altogether something else. Ninety-six percent of all the criminals in Sing Sing Prison, by their own confession, believe in God, but what kind of a God do they serve? That's a different issue, isn't it? The